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ABSTRACT

The author discusses the concepts of individualized instruction and regular class the questionable validity of intelligence and achievement tests used for placement are instruction procedures are based, such as commitment and sensitivity to others' needs, and educational decisions which affect the individualization of instruction, such as the selection of objectives. Eight school conditions (such as diversified materials to suit each child's needs) considered appropriate for facilitating individualized instruction are outlined. The need to reexamine the concept of special classes for handicapped students is stressed, and six factors which have provided motivation for mainstreaming (including the questionable validity of intelligence and achievement tests used for placement are pointed out. (LS)

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INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

A PAPER FOR THE INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY COURSE FOR TEACHERS

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INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Individualized instruction is an expression that is often misunderstood. It means many things to many people. For the purposes of this discussion, it means identifying the level at which each student is able to perform and move systematically toward better academic performances. It does not necessitate that each child work in isolation from others. It does require that the teacher, with full knowledge of each child's learning needs, make decisions as to whether and when each child should be learning alone or in a group.

Individualization of learning is based upon two major premises:

First, that students learn at different rates, and

Second, that the child learns by first mastering simpler components and then moving on to complex processes. The traditional labels of age and grade level are brought into question. And learning tasks are placed in sequential and hierarchical order where necessary.

It is generally accepted that every child represents a unique collection of personal, social, mental and emotional characteristics. The interaction of these characteristics results in extremely complex processes, the extent of which can be seen in Guilford's work (6). He estimates that there are about 120 variables of which only 60 have been identified (6). In the realm of psycho-motor abilities alone, Guilford lists six kinds of abilities which apply to each body part (5). Getzels and Jackson (1) provide another indication of the complexity of the human mind by pointing out that when intelligence tests are used for selecting the talented, about 70% of the persons who score in the top 1/5th on the creativity sub-tests are overlooked.

Given this wide array of individual differences among learners, it seems reasonable to expect that individual attention should be afforded to the

educational objectives selected for or by each student as well as the subject matter, learning activities, and materials used to achieve those objectives. Each child should be provided with a scope and sequence of educational objectives geared to his needs, and provided with the opportunity to achieve those objectives in ways which best meet his learning style. Finally, the child's performance should be evaluated in ways which are consonant with the selected objectives and the abilities of the child.

As educators have come to realize the importance of individualization of instruction, procedures have been developed to implement this worthwhile concept in the classroom. Those procedures have been based upon the following principles:

1. Individualization of instruction places the emphasis on the pupil and the teacher as persons and the interaction that takes place between them.
2. Individualization of instruction occurs when the teacher recognizes and responds to the emotional, academic, intellectual and physical capabilities of the learner.
3. Individualization of instruction occurs when the teacher goes beyond ordinary achievement.
4. Individualization of instruction also occurs when the teacher considers the pupil to be an individual with unique perceptions, values, concepts and needs and when he creatively fashions learning opportunities to enhance pupils' individuality.
5. Individualization of instruction leads to commitment and sensitivity to others' needs.

Using these principles, the educator exercises his educational decision-making prerogatives in a number of ways. Decisions relating to the organization and development of learning experiences form the central focus for all curriculum

and teaching operations according to Herrick (7). Ideally, those decisions, which are ultimately determinants of the child's entire educational program, are made in consultation with the learner, where appropriate. The educational decisions which affect the individualization of instruction include:

1. The selection of objectives. This includes the identification of the topic to be studied, the means for organizing the learning center, the instructional plan which is to be followed, and the identification of appropriate evaluation activities.

2. Learning relationships. Included in this category are the identification of the teacher and pupil roles, determination of inter-personal dynamics which are most supportive of personal, social and educational needs of all involved.

3. Deployment of resources. This includes patterns for grouping children and teachers, plans for utilization of space and time, and flow patterns for instructional materials and resources.

The teacher's prerogatives for decision-making intensely affect the "special" or exceptional child, because he represents either end of the learning continuum. The unique needs which he brings to the school setting are, perhaps, more pronounced than the unique needs which the non-exceptional child brings. The exceptional child may have pronounced deficits--emotional, physical, or mental--or pronounced assets. Generally, the further the child is from the midpoint on the continuum, the greater the challenge he presents for the teacher. The extreme ends of the continuum demand resources and environments which may not exist in most instructional settings. The teacher must create those resources and settings and then implement the course of instruction.

The following school conditions have been suggested (1) as appropriate for facilitating individualization of instruction:

1. The teacher is sensitive to each child's interests, abilities, and aspirations.
2. The school setting is such that it arouses enthusiasm and zest for learning by opening to each student many possible areas for exploration.
3. Each child has a stable place in a cohesive group within which he interacts.
4. Each child takes an active part in his own development by participating in the establishment of purposes, learning activities, and assessment procedures.
5. Each pupil actively engages in learning in an environment which is attractive, adequately equipped, and appropriate to his individual enterprises and the enterprises of the group within which he is working.
6. Each child has at hand, or within easy reach, a wealth of diversified materials suited to his needs.
7. Each child has insightful guidance which leads him in developing a sense of direction by nurturing his initiative and abilities.
8. The elements in the school environment are evaluated with regard to the contributions they make to the development of realistic and wholesome self-concepts.

It can be anticipated that when instruction is organized on an individual basis in the manner envisioned, the roles which are traditionally assigned to teacher and learner might require redefinition. For his part, the teacher must design his teaching to the needs of the individual students rather than to the demands of a large amorphous group. To some, this might seem contrary to the

American ideal of equal education since, at times, that ideal is interpreted to imply identical treatment for every learner. On the contrary, however, it is this very principle which requires the teacher to ensure that each student receives an instructional program which is adequately designed to meet his needs and the appropriate assistance and support to ensure success in that program. Many teachers intuitively make these modifications in their teaching behavior. They joke with one student, are solicitous with another. They check every problem with one child, spot-check another's work. Although the experienced teacher makes these adjustments automatically, it is important to monitor them constantly to make sure that they are consciously designed behaviors and not just a stagnant repertoire. The good teacher will monitor himself because he is sensitive to the varying personality patterns and needs of each student in his class.

Students are also required to modify the role which has traditionally been ascribed to them in educational circles. They must accept greater responsibility for their own learning. For some, this may mean working productively with a friend. Others might prefer to work in a group or alone. Some are overwhelmed by long and complex tasks and must seek out shorter assignments which give them frequent reinforcement, gradually building up their ability to handle more complex tasks. The student must continuously strive to expand his repertoire of learning behaviors so that he can function more easily in a world which requires the ability to adapt to a multitude of demands.

Once individualization of instruction is accepted as a viable and desirable approach to education, the concept of special classes for handicapped students needs to be seriously reexamined. Alternative approaches are being tried around the country. The several titles applied to these approaches include

"normalization"(11), "mainstreaming" (3), and "de-labeling" (4). To some, the concept is similar to what has been called integration, where children who were housed in isolated facilities are moved into regular school buildings and placed in special self-contained classes alongside classes of non-handicapped children. To others, the concept means the total elimination of any semblance of specialized groupings on the basis of disabilities, with children being assigned to grades on the basis of age and similarities to other non-handicapped children (10).

The inclination toward mainstreaming springs from a complex of motivation which includes the following factors:

1. Mainstreaming operationalizes a basic tenet in American philosophy of education (equality of educational opportunity based upon individualized instruction) and permits the meaningful inclusion and appreciation of ethnic, racial, sexual, and physical abilities without judgment about which course or method of study is more desirable. Individual differences are viewed not as deviations but as the basis on which the content and methods of education are built.
2. The validity of tests of intelligence and achievement has been challenged by those within and from without the education profession. Court actions and civil rights disputes have heightened the suspicion that such tests are unfair to children reared in settings significantly different from those of middle class and upper class families of the dominant culture. Subsequently, the appropriateness of placing children in special education classes on the basis of such test results has been called into question.
3. It is felt that through isolated classrooms, children without handicaps are deprived of important experiences when separated from handicapped children of the same age. Consequently, their ability to understand and accept differences and help the handicapped is diminished. 8

4. The principle of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" is thought to operate to the disadvantage of handicapped students who are thus labeled. The grouping of labeled children in schools or classes which are identified as "special" seems to mark the children as being different in an undesirable way. Making those children an integral part of classes for all children minimizes the need for labeling and cancels many of its undesirable effects on the children involved.

5. Some large city school districts have found that the number of children classified as handicapped was three or four times greater than the national estimates. Regardless of the reasons for that discrepancy, it was clearly not feasible for those city systems to isolate such a large segment of the city school population.

6. The capacity to deliver special education has improved. The instructional apparatus traditionally used by special educators has been made more mobile and less complex during the past twenty-five years. Standardized, mass produced, and packaged instructional materials are now available more readily and can be used more easily even by those with minimal training in special education. Many instructional approaches have been organized into systems which teachers can study and learn to use on their own or through in-service programs. As a result, some special education directors have begun to apply the new approaches and materials to exceptional children in regular class settings with encouraging results.

Individualized instruction can be implemented for exceptional education students in many ways. One approach which is currently being used is to assign the exceptional education child to a regular class homeroom and have the child leave that homeroom for special occasions. For instance, he might go to the

resource room for essential small group instruction, or to pick up and deliver assignments prepared by the resource teacher. In that case, the resource teacher, a specialist in teaching exceptional children, works out an individual schedule for each pupil to use the resource room. This might range from a few minutes to several hours each day, but usually is for less than a majority of the school day. The regular class and resource teachers share the responsibility for the student's achievement progress, and both instruct the child. The regular class teacher has the opportunity to send other pupils from his class for help from the resource teacher also. The resource teacher contributes assessment and instructional services for these children and shares instructional know-how with the regular class teacher who reciprocates in kind. In addition, there may be other services available from specialists such as a reading specialist, speech diagnostician, school psychologist. The end result is a combination of forces which facilitate the individualization of instruction for all students--handicapped and non-handicapped alike.

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